

Outcome 5 - Learning and Achieving

1. Relationships between school staff and looked after children

1.1 We support the recognition within the strategy that *building meaningful relationships between school staff and looked after children is vital to building stability and security (See 6.30)* within school environments.

1.2 We believe that engagement of teachers and other school staff is crucial to enabling effective learning and achieving and our network told us of the vital need for **greater training among teachers** and educational staff to understand **attachment** and the particular challenges faced by looked after children.

1.3 Foster carers in our network were strongly supportive of including awareness of the needs of looked after children, including attachment and trauma awareness, in **initial teacher training**.

1.4 Whilst L1 outlines that support, resources and training should be provided to schools, we feel it should be stressed that such provisions need to start as early as possible for staff entering the school environment. Therefore, in addition to this action, **we recommend that a module about looked after children be developed and incorporated into teacher training courses**.

1.5 Therefore, we propose that L1 is updated to include “Enhance access to support, resources and training for schools *and for institutions providing initial teacher training to help staff in schools* become more attachment aware.”

1.6 Furthermore, **we recommend that education professionals should be strongly encouraged to attend, participate and be proactive in looked after children reviews**, because of the clear impact this has on children’s opportunities to learn and achieve in school.

1.7 Therefore, we propose that L5 is expanded to include “As the new Personal Learning Plans for Special Educational Needs (SEN) children are developed, ensure they coordinate with PEPs for children who are also looked after. *This will include introducing a mandatory requirement for a representative from the child’s school to attend every looked after child review.*”

2. Attainment and well-being

2.1 We endorse the view in the strategy that learning and achieving should be perceived as broader than simply educational attainment but should also encompass *wider measures of success including personal development, skills, positive destinations and pathways (See 6.28)*.

2.2 We support that the strategy is seeking to address the educational attainment gap between looked after children and their peers expressed through Action L4, which seeks to *implement a review to identify the primary causes of the educational attainment gap for looked after children and develop an effective multi-agency approach to close the gap*. However, we suggest that the **terms need to be broadened to include looked after children and children who have been formerly looked after, including those who have been adopted**. There is a lack of recognition in the strategy of the ongoing social, educational and emotional challenges faced by children who

are adopted. One adoptive father expressed that “there is nothing in this [strategy] that’s not relevant for my [adopted] children”.

2.3 Therefore, we recommend that the reviews outlined in L4 should be updated to include children who are *previously looked after*.

3. Out of school activities

3.1 Aspect 6.31 of the strategy recognises the difficulties faced by many looked after children to *form and keep meaningful relationships in the school environment*. Our network reported that in taking a holistic view of learning and achieving for children, it is imperative to recognise the vital role that out-of-school activities can play in helping looked after children feel integrated and grow in their peer relationships. Importantly, this also relates to outcome 8 (contributing positively to community and society) and outcome 6 (play and leisure).

3.2 One parent told us about their foster son who attended an after-school football club. He told us that being part of a team, without the pressure of formal education and where the coaches did not know his background but encouraged and supported him, had a dramatic impact on his sense of self-worth and belonging.

3.3 Rather than simply supporting their participation as L6 outlines, we propose that groups providing out-of-school activities, including churches, youth clubs, scout and guide organisations, sports associations and schools, should be resourced with training to help them ensure looked after and previously looked after children have equal opportunities to engage. This recommendation links closely with Outcome 6, which proposes a joined-up approach to facilitating access to play and leisure. Crucially, we believe that these steps are necessary not solely for recreational purposes but also hold large potential for allowing integration with other children and can therefore increase motivation and engagement within the school environment, thereby aiding children’s learning and achieving.

3.4 Therefore we recommend that L6 is updated to include: Support looked after *and previously looked after* children to take part in after school programmes and out-of-school activities *by resourcing providers with training on meeting the needs of these children*.

4. Addressing children’s motivation to learn

4.1 We agree with the strategy in terms of the need to *foster aspirations in looked after children and be aspirational for them (See 6.28)*, with schemes by Queens University providing open days to young teenagers with the aim of raising aspirations being heralded by our network as effective methods of doing so.

4.2 However, we propose that discussions around learning and achieving, particularly in terms of education, need to go beyond aspirations to **actual motivations** of looked after children to engage with education at all.

4.3 Neither the strategy nor the implementation plan currently address the motivations (or lack of) of looked after children to learn. Foster carers and adopters in our network considered this to be essential.

4.4 We recognise that widespread lack of motivation to engage often stems from a lack of recognition and affirmation of their potential and resulting low self-confidence.

4.5 In response, we suggest that when reviewing the impact of the Looked After Children's Champion role, due attention should be given to the impact of this role in addressing children's motivation to learn.

4.6 Therefore, we propose that the review outlined in L3 should include an assessment of the Looked After Children's Champion role in improving children's motivation to learn. Foster carers and adopters in our network highlighted that having individuals in a child's life to recognise their potential and encourage them to build on and pursue their specific talents, could be hugely impactful.

4.7 The reviewed Looked After Children's Champion role should include **a requirement to improve motivation**.

Indicator for Outcome 5

1.1 It was widely felt that *attainment* is not an appropriate measure for learning and achieving as it fails to acknowledge the circumstances of a child becoming looked after and the impact of this on their ability to attain, nor does it note progress made.

1.2 We recommend that *wellbeing* could be an alternative measurable outcome which could provide a holistic perspective of what learning and achieving could mean and would take better account of the wide-ranging individual needs and journeys of each looked after child.

1.3 We therefore propose the following as an indicator for outcome 5: "An increase in the level of children who feel they are learning and achieving in school".

Outcome 8: Contributing positively to community and society

1. Diversity within the looked after children population

1.1 The strategy, in point 6.64, rightly mentions the need to tailor measures for ensuring looked after children can positively contribute to community and society, to the specific needs of disabled children as a particularly isolated group. However, social workers told us that children living outside of a family setting and in residential care are doubly disadvantaged and more isolated than other looked after children.

1.2 A social worker and foster carer told us "I worked in a residential home. Nobody even knows where it is. The children don't mix with anybody."

1.3 As a result, any effort designed to enable children to contribute positively to community and society must take account of the huge diversity within the looked after children population and the unique needs each group has in making a positive contribution.

1.4 Therefore we recommend that the implementation plan should include a new action entitled CS3, which should state; "All new measures aimed at enabling children to contribute positively to community and society will include an **impact assessment** outlining the likely impact of each measure on different sections of the looked after children population including; those with disabilities, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, those in residential care and children from minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds."

2. Promoting a positive image

2.1 The strategy makes an important point in 6.61 that we *need to help the wider public to understand more about looked after children* and notes the importance of respecting looked after children and their families in written reports and records.

2.2 Including looked after children in each and every aspect of their lives and in all decisions that affect their well-being will help build respect and appreciation for them.

2.3 In light of this, departments and other bodies who are responsible for promoting and supporting the participation of all looked after children should use the principle of 'nothing about us without us' in guiding their work; aiming for looked after children to be included in all appropriate decisions.

2.4 In addition, foster carers, adopters and social workers emphasised to us that looked after children should be supported to contribute positively to community and society *whatever their age and this should not be reserved to adulthood*. The indicators for outcome 8 should be appropriate for measuring the delivery of this outcome for children of any age. Therefore, indicators that measure at a certain age are undesirable (i.e. indicator 1). This should be emphasised in CS2 as outlined below.

2.5 Therefore, we propose that CS2 should be expanded to read "Working with other Departments and other bodies, promote and support the participation of looked after children *of all ages* in activities and fora which offer them the opportunity to contribute to their communities and society and build their confidence, self-belief and general sense of self-worth; *working towards the goal of looked after children being involved in all appropriate decisions regarding their lives.*"

Indicator for Outcome 8

1.1 Indicators two and three were the strong preference of the foster carers, adopters and social workers in our network.

1.2 Indicator one was considered inappropriate for only measuring the delivery of the outcome at age 19, therefore we would suggest removing the words "at age 19" from the indicator.



Participants felt that it is never too late to access HE/FE or Training and begin contributing positively to community and society.

1.3 Indicators four and five imply that if a child is not in the criminal justice system or abusing substances, they are therefore contributing positively to community and society. We would dispute this. For children to be contributing positively they would need to be flourishing in society, not just avoiding criminality or substance abuse. Therefore, these indicators may be complementary but could not be sufficient.

1.4 We propose that an additional indicator should be “An increase in the level of the **general public** who feel that looked after children are contributing positively to their local community or society”. This is an appropriate measure to assess the impact of CS1, which seeks to promote a more positive image of looked after children in the wider population.